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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [KWBG](#) [IS](#) [LE](#) [SY](#) [COUNTERTERRORISM](#) [GOI](#) [EXTERNAL](#)

SUBJECT: (C) EILAND OUTLINES STEPS TO PREVENT  
HIZBALLAH/IRAN ASCENSION IN LEBANON

Classified By: Ambassador Daniel C. Kurtzer for Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)  
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SUMMARY  
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1. (S) In a March 23 meeting with Deputy APNSA Abrams, A/S Welch, and the Ambassador, National Security Advisor Eiland sketched out "preliminary" GOI thinking about the future of Lebanon after a Syrian withdrawal. He described three scenarios for post-Syria Lebanon: democratic stability; a return to civil strife; or, Hizballah, possibly with Iran, filling the vacuum left by Syria. Stressing that PM Sharon has not yet approved the suggestions, Eiland reviewed a long list of steps (para 9) that the international community could take, both before and after the upcoming Lebanese elections, to avoid the third scenario. END SUMMARY.

2. (C) National Security Advisor Giora Eiland presented what he called preliminary, uncleared ideas about the future of Lebanon in a March 23 meeting with Deputy National Security Advisor Elliott Abrams, NEA Assistant Secretary David Welch and the Ambassador. The Prime Minister's foreign affairs advisor, Shalom Tourgeman, and Eiland's staffers, Gabi Blum and Eran Etzion, also participated.

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Lebanon: Post-Syria Scenarios  
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3. (S) Israel shares the international goal of creating an independent, sovereign, secure and peaceful Lebanon, Eiland said, but the withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon, while necessary for this goal, may not prove sufficient. He described three possible outcomes in Lebanon from the expected Syrian withdrawal:

-- Lebanon becomes a stable, democratic state.

-- Lebanon regresses to the civil strife of the 1970s. Several forces, he said, are trying to create this result, including the SARG, which will retain some influence in Lebanon even after the withdrawal of its troops. He suggested that the SARG could use Hizballah or Palestinians in Lebanon to foment strife as a means of demonstrating its essential stabilizing role in Lebanon. A group of Palestinians seeking to destabilize Lebanon recently moved from Syria to Lebanon, he said.

-- Hizballah, or Iran operating through Hizballah, fills the vacuum created by the Syrian departure. Factors that could contribute to this outcome include the existing Iranian presence in Lebanon, notably the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), and Iranian money; the fact that the Shia, representing about 35 percent of the Lebanese population, are the largest community in the country; the existing strength of Hizballah, which Eiland termed "the most effective military group" in Lebanon; and, Hizballah leader Nasrallah's status as what Eiland termed Lebanon's "most charismatic" figure.

4. (S) Abrams questioned the likelihood of the second scenario, pointing out that Lebanon's Christian community is much weaker now than 30 years ago, and that Lebanon has become a different country since then. Eiland responded by noting that Russian NSC Secretary Igor Ivanov, during his visit to Israel the week before, had reported hearing from Egyptian sources that the price of a Kalashnikov in Lebanon has recently soared from about \$300 to \$30,000. Eiland commented that this apparent spike in demand indicated significant fear of civil strife among the Lebanese. He noted as well his own experience as an IDF battalion commander in a Druze village near Beirut in the early 1980s. His forces, he said, tried to mediate in inter-communal disputes in the village, but the "hatred and cruelty" between the different Lebanese communities was "unimaginable." No one, he asserted, can therefore say with certainty that inter-communal violence will not erupt again, despite the shared desire of the various Lebanese groups for a successful, independent Lebanon. The Ambassador asked whether Eiland had any ideas for a strategy to head off the civil strife scenario. Eiland replied that he had not yet thought through the question.

15. (S) Eiland contended that a strengthened Hizballah emerging from the Syrian departure from Lebanon could prove destabilizing both for Lebanon and "in the Palestinian context." Should Hizballah enhance its political power in Lebanon without giving up its terrorist identity, it could establish the precedent of "a terrorist group with global reach" being accorded international legitimacy. This model of a terrorist organization with a recognized political face could also affect the future status of Palestinian terrorist groups in the West Bank and Gaza. It would also counteract the achievements of democratization in the Middle East.

16. (S) Hizballah, after the Syrian departure from Lebanon, could also move to inflame the situation along the Lebanese-Israeli border, Eiland contended. The only reason the border is now reasonably calm, he said, is that Israel and the international community effectively deter Syria from allowing Hizballah to act provocatively. Once Syria is out of Lebanon, he asked, who will be accountable for Hizballah actions? One "very possible" scenario immediately after the Syrian withdrawal is that Hizballah would decide to test Israel. UN envoy Terje Roed-Larsen reported, Eiland said, that Assad told him that "the Blue Line could turn red" (with blood) after the Syrian withdrawal.

17. (S) Eiland noted that one other troubling possibility resulting from the Syrian withdrawal could be that al-Qaeda begins to operate seriously from within the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. Up to now, he said, al-Qaeda has stayed out of the camps in deference to Syria.

18. (S) Abrams asked Eiland to describe the actual means of pressure that Syria has been able to use to restrain Hizballah up to now. While Iran has been the main party for providing arms and guidance to Hizballah, Eiland replied, Syria has acted as both the transshipment point for Iranian arms heading to Hizballah, and a supplier of arms to Hizballah in its own right. The SARG, he said, provided no other assistance to Hizballah, other than "a certain umbrella." He stressed that Hizballah does not depend on Syria for maintaining its military capability.

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Strategies for Molding the Outcome in Lebanon  
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19. (S) Stressing again that he was presenting "preliminary thoughts" only, Eiland presented a list of recommended steps, divided between the pre- and post-election periods in Lebanon, for the international community to take in order to effect a successful transition in Lebanon.

Pre-Election  
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-- An international declaration linking recognition of the "legitimacy" of a newly elected Lebanese government to its commitment, made in advance of the elections, to the "missing elements" of UNSCR 1559 (i.e., the disarmament of all militias). This expected commitment would include an explicit understanding that the existing status of Hizballah is only temporary.

-- Continued pressure on Syria to complete its withdrawal before the elections.

-- Pressure on Syria to restrain Hizballah and to sever its ties with the organization.

-- Pressure on Syria not to send Palestinian militants to Lebanon, and to cut off assistance to them.

(The pressure on Syria to restrain militant groups would include a clear threat to President Assad that he would be held accountable for the operations of armed groups.)

-- Similar pressure on Iran, including through the EU-3 negotiations. Pressed on the advisability of bringing other issues into the dialogue about Iran's nuclear program, Eiland contended that the EU-3 negotiations with Iran have already gone beyond Iran's nuclear program. Etzion specified that the EU-3 have raised Iran's support for terrorism in the dialogue.

-- Monitoring of the elections in Lebanon.

Post-Election  
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-- A clear international demand for the new GOL to implement UNSCR 1559 fully.

-- Extension to the new GOL of a "grace period" between the elections and a final deadline (TBD) for the full implementation of UNSCR 1559. The international community would recognize the legitimacy of the new GOL until the

deadline. Also during this grace period, the international community would reinforce the formal status of Hizballah as a terrorist organization (e.g., by adding it to the EU terrorism list), and refuse to deal with Hizballah.

-- Should the new GOL fail to meet the international deadline for full implementation of UNSCR 1559, it would "lose its legitimacy," the impact of which would include non-engagement with the GOL and sanctions.

-- As the GOI understands that dismantling Hizballah cannot occur "in one day," GOL implementation of UNSCR 1559 could be phased, but must stick to a clear timetable. Chronological benchmarks for the GOL could include:

1A. Cessation of all hostile Hizballah activities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

1B. Cessation of all anti-Israeli activity along the Blue Line.

1C. A complete cut-off of all support channels to Hizballah, from both Syria and Iran; deployment of the LAF in all border passages to ensure the cut-off.

1D. Withdrawal of Hizballah militants from the Blue Line area and deployment of the LAF. (Concurrent deployment of Hizballah and the LAF would be unacceptable.) End of UNIFIL mandate.

1E. Turnover of strategic munitions held by Hizballah to the GOL.

1F. Dismantlement of all Hizballah military and terrorist capabilities. Some/some individual members could be allowed to enlist in the LAF.

-- Implementation of UNSCR 1559 must also include withdrawal of the IRGC and the dismantlement of all Palestinian militias. Eiland commented that the SARG now exercises the only restraint on the Palestinian groups.

-- A demand from the international community that Lebanon employ Western standards of combating terrorist finance and drug trafficking.

-- International support for the Lebanese transition should include:

1A. "Reasonable strengthening" of the LAF, e.g. in training and capacity building.

1B. Economic assistance, but only if linked to GOL performance on 1559.

1C. A possible international stabilization force. While the GOI would not have a role in this, such a deployment could affect Israel as a precedent for international action in Gaza.

110. (S) Turning to the Israeli role in the strategy he sketched, Eiland commented that the GOI understands that the time is not ripe for an Israeli-Lebanese peace agreement, and that any Israeli comments about a possible agreement would be counterproductive. The GOI is nevertheless ready to contribute to a successful transition in Lebanon through bilateral discussions on issues such as water and security; participation in regional economic projects, e.g., water, energy, or transportation; and, a cessation of overflights of Lebanese airspace once terrorist activity from Lebanon ends.

111. (S) Eiland stressed that the GOI would not/not be willing to agree to any territorial concessions, such as at Sheba'a Farms, as part of any deals with Hizballah. He said he made this point because UN envoy Terje Roed-Larsen has raised the issue.

112. (S) Observing that Hizballah could see the strategy Eiland set forth as an existential threat, the Ambassador asked Eiland to assess how Hizballah might react. Eiland replied that Hizballah cares most about its internal legitimacy within Lebanon. Should it fully understand international expectations, Hizballah might willingly transform itself from a group that is more an Iranian tool than a Lebanese entity, to the opposite.

113. (S) Welch asked Eiland whether precedents exist for integrating a militia such as Hizballah into a national army. The GOI views integration of Hizballah into the LAF as too dangerous, Eiland replied, although the GOI could accept some individual Hizballah members joining the LAF. The top priority in dismantling Hizballah, he stressed, is the removal of Hizballah's strategic military capability. The group currently has enough rockets, many of which are based in populated areas, to cause significant damage to Israel in a short time.

114. (S) The Ambassador commented that the strategy Eiland presented could prove too ambitious to be feasible. Eiland

responded that a strong GOL could be responsive to incentives. Welch asked whether the GOI intended to present the strategy to anyone else. Eiland said the GOI might present it to the French and Larsen once PM Sharon approves the overall approach.

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Syrian Support for Terrorism, Border with Iraq  
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15. (S) Turning away from the Syrian role in Lebanon, Abrams noted that the U.S. has two other issues with Syria: its support for terrorism, and its failure to prevent insurgents from entering Iraq from Syria. He asked Eiland about possible destinations for terrorist organizations now based in Syria should the SARG expel them. Eiland pointed to what he said was the troubling precedent, from the 1970s, of Syria sending the headquarters of terrorist groups to the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. This outcome could repeat itself, he said, should a new GOL turn out to be weak. Tourgeman noted that, according to Israeli intelligence, the terrorists who carried out the February 25 bombing in Tel Aviv received instructions to call Lebanon, not Syria, from their cell phones.

16. (S) Abrams commented that Assad knows that he would have to deliver on Iraq, not just on UNSCR 1559, to satisfy the U.S. This realization could lead Assad to conclude that he need not bother with 1559. Eiland pointed out that prospects for the future of the Assad regime could be questionable following a "humiliating" Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon. Noting that undermining the Assad regime is not U.S. policy, Abrams commented that the U.S. does not necessarily need to try not to undermine Assad. He offered his personal assessment that destabilizing the regime would begin a process that would ultimately result in its fall. Eiland concurred.

17. (U) Abrams and Welch cleared this message.

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